UNITED
NATIONS

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Economic and Social Council

Distr.
LIMITED

E/CONF.85/L.87
11 August 1992

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

SIXTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE
ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
New York, 25 August-3 September 1992
Item 12 (b) of the provisional agenda*

TOPONYMIC EDUCATION AND PRACTICE AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION: TRAINING COURSES IN TOPONYMY

Report of the Temporary Convenor of the Working Group on Toponymy Courses

Paper submitted by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN)**

* E/CONF.85/1/Rev.1.

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1. One of the problems discussed by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names is the lack of personnel in member countries that are qualified in toponymy. For this reason the Group of Experts has placed emphasis on the organization of training courses in this subject and has stimulated such organization by both moral and financial support. Courses sponsored by the Group of Experts and by the Pan American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH) have been held in:

Cisarua, Indonesia (1982), Rabat, Morocco (1985), Panama (1987), Québec, Canada (1988), Cipanas, Indonesia (1989), Quito, Ecuador (1989), Aguascalientes, Mexico (1991) and Pretoria, South Africa (1992). The languages of these courses have been Spanish, Arabic and English.

2. The general model of these courses has been a two-week programme of lectures, alternated by practical exercises and field work. In these courses usually the complete procedure, from names collecting in the field through office editing to representation of the names on maps, was covered and exercises given.

3. The aim of the courses has been, generally,

(a) To prepare the participants for all sorts of issues and problems in toponymy on which they would have to make decisions later, with the hope that these will be well-informed decisions;

(b) Transfer of knowledge and guidelines, showing the example of other countries with more advanced toponymic programmes, and the transfer of expertise through practical exercises;

(c) To refer the participants to all sorts of publications that might be helpful in the work and to all available sources.

4. The Convenor's job is to:

(a) Stimulate the organization of courses;

(b) Act as a clearing-house for teaching materials and information on course programmes; planned courses, and available lectures;

(c) Coordinate the offer of and demand for courses;

(d) Prepare toponymic experts world wide for an attitude in which they are willing to invest their time, for nominal fees, in the schooling of their colleagues all over the world;

(e) Induce course organizers to publish course proceedings, and make them available for toponymists all over the world.

5. For the period covered in this report (November 1991-September 1992) the aims stated in paragraph 4 have not been met completely, though progress has been made. Teaching material in the English language is increasing (manuals

by Orth and by Kadmon), but efforts should be taken to translate them into other United Nations languages (Orth's manual has been translated into French). The Canadian-produced Toponymy Course Kit (see para. 9 below) is available in English and French.

6. Though this was requested, no course material from the PAIGH-sponsored courses was obtained by the Convenor, nor information on their content.

7. The Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names should be a good forum to request United Nations Member States to provide information to the Convenor of the Working Group on courses, and on lecturers willing to participate and enabled to do so by their Governments.

8. The temporary Convenor took part in the organization, and in the lecturing programme, of the United Nations Training Course in Toponymy for Southern Africa. He is at present trying to organize a follow-up course.

9. The work of the Convenor was greatly helped by the efforts of Canada in providing a Toponymy Course Kit, consisting of manuals, literature, brochures and other relevant material, free of charge to course participants. Both the courses in Cipanas (Indonesia) and Pretoria (South Africa) have profited greatly from this Canadian endeavour.